

SB69 and SB70

February 4, 2009

Testimony of Donald Jones, Trustee, Helena School District # 1
PO Box 635
Helena, Montana 59624
406-431-2120

Although Montana's public schools face great challenges, such as closing the achievement gap and maximizing learning for all children, we still continue to achieve success regardless of our funding issues. All Montana school districts are working hard to provide our children with the highest-quality instruction possible to promote student achievement.

We have implemented full-day kindergarten and Indian Education for all. Math and reading scores are improving in all grades, and more students than ever are going to college. Compared to other states, our reading, math and science scores are among the nation's best. Our children consistently rank at the top nationally in ACT and SAT scores. We are ranked as one of the smartest states in the country. Our schools are ranked in the tops for safety, and in one study our kids ranked as the best behaved school children in the nation.

While it's tempting to focus on our successes (and fun), we must remember that what keeps our economy strong is the amount of creativity and innovation that we foster. America leads the world in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial innovation and creativity—that's how we create jobs and that's what going to save us with our economy. That is why we must not forget the importance of having a curriculum and school system that creates a love of learning, curiosity and creativity.

We can do more, and we must do better. We need to educate the whole child. We shortchange our young people and limit their future if we do not create places of learning that encourage and celebrate every aspect of each student's capacity for learning. Today's students must be prepared unlike any generation before to think critically and analytically while acting with innovation and creativity.

Investing in quality public education is the key to our economic strength and our children's future. The engine that drives our economy is our public education system. Our top priority should be assuring our students' ability to get a quality education which is made even more imperative in these tough economic times. Please support the investment in our children and their economic future as set forth in SB 69 and SB 70.

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. —Nelson Mandela

Montana's public schools are world class! We can't afford to lose our edge

Reading scores among the nation's best: Montana ranks 6th in the nation for having the largest proportion of public school 4th graders scoring at the highest two levels in reading in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Montana 8th graders rank 3rd in the nation in reading in the NAEP. National Center for Education Statistics. *Nation's Report Card: Reading 2002*. June 2003.

Math scores among the nation's best: Montana ranks 2nd in the nation for having the highest percentage of public school 8th graders scoring at the highest two levels in math. - National Center for Education Statistics. *Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2000*. August 2001.

Best in the nation in science: Montana is #1 in the nation for having the highest proportion of 8th graders who scored at the highest two levels in science. National Center for Education Statistics. *Nation's Report Card: State Science 2000 Reports*. November 2001.

Science scores among the world's best: Montana 8th graders have the 2nd highest science scores in the world. - National Center for Education Statistics. *Linking the Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): A Technical Report*. August 1998.

ACT and SAT scores among the nation's best: Montana is one of the top 15 states in the proportion of high school graduates with scores in the top 20% nationally on either ACT or SAT college entrance examinations. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. *Measuring Up 2006: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education*. November 2007.

ACT scores are among the nation's best: Montana's ACT college entrance examination scores rank 4th highest out of the 25 states in which more than half the graduating seniors took the ACT. ACT, Inc. 2008. *ACT Composite Averages by State*. Data published on ACT Web site. (Similar data exist for earlier years.)

Among the nation's "smartest states": Montana is ranked number 7 in "smartest states" in the country. State Rankings 2006-2007. (Morgan Quitno Press: Lawrence, KS). September, 2008.

Schools among the nation's safest: Montana has some of the safest schools in the country. Montana is one of the top 10 states in the country in the percentage of public school 4th graders and the number one state in the country in the percentage of public school 8th graders who report feeling safe in their school. Education Week. *Quality Counts 2002. Building Blocks for Success: State Efforts in Early Childhood Education*.
<http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/qc/archives/QC02full.pdf>